

MARK BALDRIDGE

# Eight-tracks charted dreams

Now let us praise the eight-track tape.

This is no nostalgia piece from another aging undergrad, no luke-warm yearning for a bygone era. I'm quite serious when I say the eight-track changed the world.

Here's what happened: Music, formerly available only on the cumbersome vinyl disks that our children will not recognize, became suddenly portable. The car stereo came into being.

The eight-track offered freedom of choice unavailable previously and led to the invention of the "boom box."

The boom box made it possible to carry your music with you — to the park, to school parking lots and outdoor parties.

You could share it with your friends and aggravate passersby.

Parks and other open public spaces were immediately taken over by kids with their boom boxes. The burgeoning youth culture was about to explode.

It hardly matters what music they actually played — I said this was no nostalgia trip — so long as it was popular with the kids.

And here we come to the best feature of the eight-track: Its construction.

If there was ever a time when McLuhan was right on, it was now: With the eight-track, the medium really was the message.

The eight-track was a cheap plastic housing containing a tape loop.

The eight-tracks of the tape were the left and right channel of four song tracks running parallel along the loop.

What that means is that the eight-track, once plugged in, could be played over and over without pause until the tape literally wore out.

Want to hear "Led Zeppelin IV" 20, 30, 40 times straight through? Plug her in and let her run.

You could let your favorite album run through your dreams as it played all night, unattended.

Today, as a young friend of mine points out, one can program certain CD players to repeat even a particular song or set of songs in a pre-selected



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order. One can even choose songs from different CDs to play in endless repetition.

But the eight-track was the first to offer the repeat feature for entire albums, and in many ways this makes it more important.

Even if it did not, there was another feature of the eight-track that many people don't even remember: the channel change.

Because the four song tracks ran side by side instead of end to end — they had to, to make the loop small enough to be viable — some means had to be devised to change the channel.

They must've used some mechanical means to actually shift the tape or the head, because there was an audible "CLICK diClack" as the channels changed.

Mostly this happened between songs — though the producers of the tapes didn't seem to put a lot of effort into making sure it did.

But for the longer songs of album-oriented rock groups like Rush and Jethro Tull, arranging the tape to accommodate the music just wasn't practical.

Often the last few notes or even bars would be repeated on the other side of the channel change, as a kind of propitiation for having interrupted the song.

These two features — the endless repeatability of an entire album and the interruption of the music by the channel change — made the eight-track medium entirely different experience from the same music on a record.

Hearing a record of the music with which was one of the most familiar on

the eight-track format could be disorienting.

Your ear missed the channel change — and the abrupt end of the music at the end of a side could be jarring.

You'd gotten used to hearing it — not only all the way through, but several times through.

This is what I think:

Music is like a dream. One easily slips into an altered state of consciousness, like a dream state, listening to music — particularly the psychedelic music of the era, though any era's music works as well.

The CLICK diClack of the channel change, the first time you heard it in the middle of a Neil Peart drum solo, woke you up, momentarily, from the dream.

If listening to music induces a dream state, listening to the same musical series endlessly repeated does something far more obvious.

And every time there is the CLICK diClack there to wake you up — until, that is, it becomes part of the music for you.

A whole generation of kids became a species of "lucid dreamers" as they learned to navigate and control their altered states of consciousness brought on by music.

They became experts in hypnotic trance, without ever really knowing that was what they were.

So when LSD and marijuana became readily available on the street, there was a whole generation that was ready to take that next step — glory hallelujah! — into the still uncharted terrain of human consciousness.

Baldrige is a senior English major, a Daily Nebraskan arts and entertainment senior reporter and a columnist.

SAM KEPFIELD

# Illegitimacy may bring downfall

Throughout human history, the great empires — Rome, Britain, the U.S.S.R. — all collapsed from an inner social rot. Should present trends continue, the United States may become the latest casualty. The reason? Illegitimacy.

Only 18 months ago, Vice President Dan Quayle decried the societal rejection of traditional norms and values. One sentence, though, aroused the ire of the liberal media and cultural elite, when Quayle criticized TV's "Murphy Brown." All else was lost in the uproar. The Democrats belittled "family values" throughout the '92 election.

Fast forward to last week. President Clinton now talks about strengthening families, sounding suspiciously like Quayle. His aides and Cabinet members wring their hands publicly over the rising tide of illegitimacy. All of a sudden, the very "family values" ridiculed a year previously are now very much in vogue. It remains to be seen whether this is a smokescreen, another attempt by the most leftist president this century to mask himself as a conservative.

Some numbers begin to tell the story, cause and effect:

- Teen pregnancy rates doubled from 1972 to 1990.
- Births to unmarried women were 5 percent of all births in 1960; they were 28 percent in 1990.
- Divorce rates doubled from 1960 to 1990 as marriage rates fell from 74 to 54 per 1,000 in the same period.
- Violent crime jumped from 250,000 in 1960 to 2 million in 1990; the overall crime rate quadrupled.
- Juvenile crime arrests rose from 150 to 425 per 1,000 from 1960 to 1990.
- The number of children on Aid to Families with Dependent Children quadrupled; child poverty has been on the rise since 1970; and single-parent families have gone from 9 per-



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cent of all families in 1960 to 27 percent.

The bottom line here is that single motherhood has become easier than ever, fed by an increasing lack of stigma from society. Illegitimacy, which approaches 80 percent in some black areas, is now creeping into lower-income white areas as well, where half of all births now are out of wedlock.

Fed by an increasingly voracious welfare state, single motherhood has become acceptable in many areas, a way for some girls to get attention and earn that most valued commodity in schools today, self-esteem. What all the defenders of single motherhood overlook is that a single woman with children has never been a viable economic unit in society. When a welfare check replaces a working father, the result is a horde of aggressive, irresponsible young men roaming the streets, hipped on drugs and packing MAC-10s.

How to solve this problem? Sociologist Charles Murray proposes stigmatization, that society make having a child out of wedlock cost. Make the mother, her parents or the father and his parents responsible for the care of the child, since Murray would eliminate all welfare payments to single mothers with children. It used to be fairly simple when a girl got pregnant — they got married. Now, they get welfare.

Imagine if the government announced that nine months from now,

all welfare would be cut off. The result would be conversations between parents and children, boyfriends and girlfriends all over the country. Having a baby would be again seen as a serious, life-changing affair, and sex again seen as something that has heavy consequences, not merely a pleasurable roll in the hay.

Murray also would eliminate restrictions — favored by black leaders to prevent "cultural suicide" — that keep white couples from adopting black babies. In addition, other laws would terminate birth parents' rights once the child was adopted, eliminating replays of the Jessica DeBoer case.

If the present trends continue, if nothing is done, then illegitimacy will find its way into the white community as it did the black areas, and with it will come the attendant social pathologies, namely crime of all varieties. When gang-banging takes over the suburbs, calls for law and order will ring out.

Given the human penchant for forfeiting civil liberties in favor of order, the United States in the year 2020 could well be an authoritarian police state. An army of fatherless children will have done what the Red Army could not — bring America to its knees.

Kepfield is a graduate student in history and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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